because the cause or causes of their evolution were identical or nearly identical? and thus a considerable number of supposed changes in the level of many countries, of which we do not find geological records, can be dispensed with.

It is true that instances to be explained by the migration or accident theories are of more frequent occurrence and more easily proved; but I think it would be just as interesting, where these cannot be admitted, to trace in all its bearings the similitude of species in distant countries. This view would, at least, open up a field of fresh research, and afford a new illustration and confirmation of the great theory of evolution.

XXVI.—*On the Nidification of certain Indian Birds.*—Part III.* By Andrew Anderson, F.Z.S.

The Nukta or Comb-Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanonotus*), the Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna arcuata*), and the Cotton-Teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) are non-migrant, and breed throughout the plains of India during the "rains," viz. from July to September, according to locality.

These Ducks, according to my experience, nest almost exclusively on trees; and they are, so far as nidification is concerned, essentially perching Ducks. They begin to pair early in June, and may be seen flying about in search of a suitable tree almost simultaneously with the first fall of rain, which generally occurs in the north-western provinces on or about the 18th of that month.

SARKIDIORNIS MELANONOTUS.

This curious and handsomely coloured Duck deposits its eggs in holes of old deciduous trees, and never, I should say, "in grass by the sides of tanks &c.," as stated by Jerdon. The male bird (as in fact do all the others) assists the female in the selection of a site. I have frequently watched both birds flying into trees together, the male uttering a harsh grating noise, while his mate is left behind on inspection duty.

---

* For Part II. see Ibis, 1873, p. 74.

Although the Nuktas nest by preference in trees, I have known their doing so in holes of old ruined forts; as a general rule they select localities in close proximity to water.

I have no actual proof of their appropriating old nests, as is frequently done by the Whistling Teal; but it is worth mentioning that a nest of *Haliaëtus leucoryphus*, which I had examined last winter for the eggs of *Ascalaphia bengalensis*, and which was *at the time* tenanted by this Owl, actually contained seven or eight rotten eggs which are, in my opinion, referable to this Duck.

The number of eggs seems to vary considerably; fifteen and twenty have been brought to me from one nest, the advanced state of incubation clearly indicating that in all cases the full complement had been laid. I was present, however, at the capture of a female Nukta on her nest, which yielded the extraordinary number of *forty* eggs! Of course it is just possible, though highly improbable, that this may have been the joint produce of two birds; but the emaciated condition of the one captured, coupled with the fact that one egg was an abnormally small one, and evidently her last effort, do not favour such a supposition.

The tree selected was an ancient banyan (*Ficus indica*) which overlooked a large sheet of water, several miles in circumference; the nest-hole was at an elevation of some 20 feet, 3 feet deep, and 2 in circumference.

The eggs (incubation was barely commenced) were laid several tiers deep, and those at the bottom were a little soiled from resting on the damp wood. It is highly probable that a large proportion of these eggs are never hatched, and that they all become discoloured as the process of incubation progresses.

The thirty-nine full-sized eggs average $2\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{3}{4}$ inches; they are long obtusely pointed ovals; and in feel, polish, and texture they resemble a white billiard ball.

The boss or fleshy protuberance of the drake gets greatly enlarged during the breeding-season, frequently measuring $2{\cdot}2 \times 2{\cdot}4$ inches at the *base*.

DENDROCYGNA ARCUATA.

Jerdon could never have found a full clutch of the eggs of the Whistling Teal, or he would not have limited the number to "six or eight" ('Birds of India,' vol. iii. p. 790). Ordinarily this Duck lays fully a dozen eggs; but I am indebted to my friend Mr. Fynes-Clinton for two clutches of twelve and fourteen respectively, which he took from the *same nest*; whether these were laid by one or two birds must of course remain an open question.

On the 29th June, 1872, Mr. Clinton flushed a bird from the top of a low date-palm (*Phœnix dactylifera*), and found the first-mentioned lot (twelve); on the 13th July he happened to visit the same locality, and to his surprise found the second clutch in *exactly the same* situation; the Duck was on her eggs. Now the dates are so coincident that, supposing these twenty-six eggs to be the produce of two birds, the second one must have laid her first egg the *very* day after the removal of the first batch.

As to situation, the choice may be mentioned in the following order:—first, depression at the fork of the lower branches of large-limbed trees; second, old nests, particularly those belonging to Crows, Herons, &c.; and, third, thorny scrub or grass on the edge of swamps.

The eggs measure 1·9 × 1·5 inch, and when fresh are of a milky white colour; the inside membrane is a delicate salmon-pink tint.

NETTAPUS COROMANDELIANUS.

This species nests in holes of trees and old ruins, and never, according to my experience, in old nests or on the ground.

I once had an opportunity of watching a pair in the act of selecting their habitation. They invariably flew into the tree together; and while the female used to enter the hole, to reconnoitre, as it were, the male sat on a bough watching for her exit. No sooner did she make her appearance than they both flew away together, giving utterance to a peculiar cackling sound, which has been pronounced to be like the words "fixed bayonets." Their visits used to be repeated at intervals of every fifteen or twenty minutes. The drake never went into the hole; and I am therefore inclined to believe that he does not lend his aid in the performance of the duties of incubation.

The greatest number of eggs laid by the Goslet, of which I have a record, is twelve. This nest was taken by Mr. Spry at Budaon in August last. The hole occupied was at no great height; but it was 3½ feet deep, and only large enough to admit of ingress and egress; the contents had to be removed by means of an iron spoon something like a soup-ladle with an extra-long handle.

The eggs are obtusely pointed ovals, and certainly large for the size of the bird; they measure 1·7 × 1·3 inch, and in shape and colour are exactly similar to those of the Whistling Teal.

Contd 1875 149

XXVII.—*Fifth Appendix to a List of Birds observed in Malta and Gozo**. By Charles A. Wright, C.M.Z.S.

269. Saxicola leucopyga, Brehm; vel *Saxicola leucocephala*, Brehm.

At length I am able to add an entirely new bird to the avifauna of Europe. I allude to *Saxicola leucopyga*, which, before the advent of the specimen now under notice, had not been observed on the European continent or any of its adjacent islands. It was shot on the 18th of April, 1872, by Signor Vitali, a public weigher of Her Majesty's Customs, on some rocky ground, called *Tal capucini*, on the south side of the Grand Harbour, in the Cotonnera district. It was set up by Signor Francesco Ellul, and came into my hands immediately afterwards. The head, nape, and rump are pure white; the tail white, slightly marked with brown towards the extremities of the feathers, except the two central feathers, which are dark brown. The rest of the plumage is silky black or very dark brown. There is no doubt now, I believe, of the identity of this bird with *Saxicola leucopyga*.

---

* For Fourth Appendix see Ibis, 1870, p. 488, *et seq.*